

# Report

Peer Learning Activity on Qualifications Frameworks in relation to Quality Assurance and Recognition

&

Expert Group Meeting on Credit Transfer Mechanism and Learning Outcomes

26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> April 2017, Ghent

---

## Introduction

From April 26<sup>th</sup> until April 28<sup>th</sup> 2017 the Ministry of Education of the Flemish Community of Belgium and Ghent University hosted a “twin” meeting for a group of selected experts from Asia and Europe on a number of related topics including qualifications frameworks, quality assurance schemes, credit transfer mechanisms and the use of learning outcomes as an underlying concept in these. So this meeting was on one hand a “*Peer Learning Activity on Qualifications Frameworks in relation to Quality Assurance and Recognition*” and on the other hand a meeting of the *Expert Group on Credit Transfer Mechanism and Learning Outcomes* which held its first meeting in China in March 2016. The reasons why the Flemish organisers choose for this joint meeting was that it would offer a possibility to enhance the exchange of ideas and to cater for a clearly increasing interest in and importance of the topics that were focused on both in Asia and in Europe.

Participants and speakers came from these countries: Belgium/Flemish Community, Belgium/French Community, Lithuania, Romania, Germany, France, Norway, Brunei Darussalam, Thailand and from the following organizations: SEAMEO RIHED, DAAD, EQAR, NVAO and the European Commission.

## Table of Content

Introduction.....	1
An insight in (regional) systemic developments .....	3
The development of Qualifications Frameworks .....	3
Impact on the institutional level .....	3
Impact on international cooperation .....	4
The development of Quality Assurance systems .....	4
Impact on the institutional level .....	4
Impact on international cooperation .....	5
The development of credit (transfer) systems.....	6
Impact on the institutional level .....	6
Impact on international cooperation .....	6
The importance of cultural diversity .....	7
Conclusions.....	8
Expert Group Meeting on Credit Transfer Mechanism and Learning Outcomes.....	9
State of affairs .....	9
TO DO's.....	9
Proposed concrete actions / focal points.....	9
ANNEX 1: Programme .....	11
ANNEX 2: List of participants.....	14

## An insight in (regional) systemic developments

A very important outcome of the meeting is that it gave the participants a very valuable first-hand insight in (regional) systemic developments such as:

- The development of Qualifications Frameworks
- The development of (Internal and External) Quality Assurance systems
- The development of credit (transfer) systems

It was very clear from the discussions that these developments have an increasing impact on the level of institutions and that these recent initiatives have a positive impact on (possibilities for) international cooperation, also between the two represented continents.

In the report we will discuss the main issues that were discussed regarding the development of Qualifications Frameworks, (Internal and External) Quality Assurance systems and credit (transfer) systems.

## The development of Qualifications Frameworks

Both continents have seen during the last decade the emergence of overarching Qualifications Frameworks (meta-frameworks). We discussed the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) as an example of a very important regional initiative in Asia. From the European side we were introduced to both the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), which focuses on higher education (for all Bologna-countries) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL), which has a wider span but is limited to the EU.

It was clearly pointed out as major advantage that all these overarching qualifications frameworks are based on **learning outcomes** as a crucial underlying concept.

Experts from as well Asia as Europe stressed that undoubtedly the translation of these overarching qualifications frameworks into “National Qualifications Frameworks” (or, especially in Europe, also: into Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks) happens at different speeds which jeopardizes of course its full use in international cooperation, at the labour market etc.

### Impact on the institutional level

Even though not all countries have succeeded equally in ‘translating’ the main principles of the mentioned ‘meta-frameworks’ into national legislation, it became clear from the discussions that for higher education institutions in both Europe and Asia this is not the main issue. For these institutions it’s not the legislative work on meta-frameworks that drives the change but the potential dynamic this (mental) paradigm shift creates at grass-root level. It was generally agreed on that for HEI’s the main outcome of the implementation of qualifications frameworks lies in the adoption of **learning outcomes-based, student-oriented and co-created study programmes**. The paradigm shift can imply very far-reaching results that potentially are very beneficial for individual learners. A straightforward example that was discussed during the meeting is the emergence of RPL/APEL-procedures in higher education, for

the recognition of prior learning / the accreditation of prior experiential learning and the possibility this implies for entry to higher education or the potential exemption of courses.

### **Impact on international cooperation**

The introduction of qualifications frameworks and the use of learning outcomes has offered all stakeholders related to (higher) education and training in different continents a kind of ‘common language’. Such a joined approach enables them to discuss, exchange ideas and cross-fertilize about topics such as level descriptors and the description of study programmes, or to make arrangements for international exchange. Needless to say that this has been very beneficial to enhance mutual trust and understanding between HEI’s internationally.

It also became clear during the discussions that the introduction of qualifications frameworks and especially the use of learning outcomes offers an important basis for recognition: of degrees, of courses of study abroad periods. It was felt that this is not only the way forward for recognition within a region (cfr. ECTS in Europe which has since the introduction of the new [ECTS Users’ Guide](#) adopted an LO-approach), but also across regions (for “intercontinental cooperation”). For the latter reference was made to the [SHARE-project](#) that has recently ignited a pilot-scheme for student mobility between selected ASEAN and EU universities.

### **The development of Quality Assurance systems**

Not only qualifications frameworks but also external quality assurance systems (external reviews, accreditation processes, institutional audits,...) are more and more taking learning outcomes into account or even using this as the basis for their approach. This is also the case for regulatory QA-frameworks or common QA- guiding principles such as the [European Standards and Guidelines](#) (ESG) or [ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework](#) (AQAF) and more and more also for internal (institutional) QA approaches. Not surprisingly the reason why the latter development can be observed, is linked to the fact that in many cases these general principles have been translated into national QA-systems (or even legislation).

### **Impact on the institutional level**

Because the emergence of qualifications frameworks resulting in a more common learning outcomes-based approach has influenced also internal QA-systems to a large extend, it could be concluded from the discussions that these in more and more institutions have laid the foundations for a true quality culture.

It was hence argued that the use of learning outcomes has also had an impact on the **quality** of study programmes itself and that the increased explicitness of the expectations from students has allowed for better profiling of study programmes and better communication with ‘the outside world’, including employers and potential students.

Participants however agreed on the fact that the shift has certainly not been completed and that especially defining learning outcomes and the assessment and demonstration of achieved learning

outcomes remain a big challenge for (higher) education practitioners. During the discussions it became clear that this is especially the case for what one could refer to as “21<sup>st</sup> Century skills”, a series of higher-order skills, abilities, and learning dispositions that have been identified as being required for success in 21<sup>st</sup> century society and workplaces by educators, business leaders, academics, and governmental agencies. This seems to be linked to the large ‘attitudinal component’ in this type of learning outcomes.

This makes clear that a lot of importance has to be given to the way in which learning outcomes are written but even more so to the choice of an adjusted assessment. Speakers referred to the expression ‘the tail wags the dog’ to describe this: it has to be clear from the start what will be finally be expected from a learner after finishing the learning activity. For a fair assessment, it was suggested, of the learning outcomes involving external evaluators at some time during the evaluation process could be considered.

In general, the following suggestions for successfully using learning outcomes in a higher education context were agreed on:

- Limit the number of learning outcomes and put them in a matrix crossing the learning outcomes with the course components
- Create a more integrated curriculum instead of separate courses (“present it as one big cake rather than as a collection of small cupcakes”)
- Make your approach fully student-centered
- Include (also external) stakeholders in defining learning outcomes and the curriculum based upon it
- Create a real ‘learning & living campus’ where students also learn from the interstitial curriculum
- Make use of co-creation, it is the key to success (joined ownership of the curriculum by all teachers, involvement of graduates/students/working field etc.)

### **Impact on international cooperation**

As was already mentioned, learning outcomes more and more constitute a kind of ‘common language’ for practitioners in higher education. Since this adds to the mutual trust and understanding it logically plays a crucial role at different levels in international cooperation.

First of all it clearly facilitates cooperation, e.g. on student/staff mobility, between higher education institutions from different countries with different HE-systems since the use of learning outcomes facilitates to a large extent that clear agreement can be achieved on the envisaged aims of the cooperation. This can then, and this is a second advantage of using learning outcomes in international cooperation, possibly lead to (very) far-reaching forms of cooperation such as the development of mobility windows, setting up joint programmes, PhD-exchange etc.

Finally it was argued that the use of learning outcomes offer a very good (and even Indispensable) basis for benchmarking (on programme level) between universities from different countries.

## The development of credit (transfer) systems

The third main topic discussed during the joined meeting was the development of credit (transfer) systems in both Europe and Asia, surely one of the more divergent approaches discussed. In Europe for instance (i.e. the 48 Bologna countries) there is one officially adopted credit transfer and accumulation system, viz. ECTS (European Transfer and Accumulation System). Asia on the other hand has seen the emergence of a large variety of approaches, where even the names of some of these approaches that were discussed during the meeting clarify that there are kind some differences:

- AUN – ACTS: the AUN ASEAN Credit Transfer System
- UMAP – UCTS: the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific Credit Transfer Scheme
- SEAMEO – RIHED ACTF: the SEAMEO – RIHED Academic Credit Transfer Framework

## Impact on the institutional level

Whereas all systems presented have a clear focus on “student work-load”, big differences in interpretation and practical implementation of the concept still seem to exist. Since credits based on student work-load are one of the corner stones of more and more higher education systems, but also (just like learning outcomes) of curriculum development at the institutional level, the divergence in implementation necessitates a thorough follow-up. As was stressed during the discussions, just like learning outcomes, institutions more and more use (and have to use, as the result of the ‘Lisbon Recognition Convention’) credits (and more specifically: substantial differences in the number of credits) as the basis for recognition of degrees, of courses, ..., which makes an overall agreed upon approach even more important.

## Impact on international cooperation

These differences in interpretation also play a crucial role in the use of credits (again: as part of our international ‘common language’ adding to the mutual trust and understanding) in international cooperation. During the discussions, it was not only stressed to what extend this facilitates qualitative student mobility, but also that students attach a great deal of importance to credit transfer. The same, by the way, can also be said about grade conversion, which clearly came up during the presentations as well.

An interesting point that arose during the discussions has to do with the perceived importance of supporting documents (Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records,... as these are called in ECTS) to keep an overview of the students learning pathway (offering a total overview of learning outcomes, number of credits etc.). There was clearly a (cultural) difference between Asian and European countries in this respect which was deemed of such importance that a separate chapter in this report will be devoted to it.

## The importance of cultural diversity

Indeed, the cultural diversity among the participants was perceived as a great wealth and clear added value of the meeting. The presentations and discussions offered participants a unique mirror of their own regional (EU, ASEAN,...) and national developments and participants clearly acted as each other's critical friends.

Especially whether and how the generally agreed upon important concept of "mutual trust & understanding" as a basis for international cooperation had to be "materialised", clearly showed how different this is approached in the two continents represented. For instance whether we need all these written documents which are so typical for a credit system like ECTS (e.g. Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records,...) and what role these play was a clear point of difference. At the risk of reducing the complexity of the problem, one could briefly make the following distinction: from an Asian perspective, cooperation built on mutual trust and understanding implies that no paper trail is necessary (which would only entail unnecessary "burocratisation") whereas the European approach assumes that it is exactly this materialisation of the consent (by means of a paper trail) that leads to the mutual trust and understanding.

Another (cultural) difference is related to the definition of "an hour". Whereas one generally would assume that this equals 60 minutes, 3600 seconds, 1/24 of a day etc. in practice (and related of course to its place in a credit system), it was clear that this concept is used differently. Hours as in 'workload' or 'contact hours', the of 'hours' in teacher assignments,... All made clear that it would be worthwhile to clarify these concepts across continents.

The place of moral, ethical, nation-building,... components in a Qualifications Framework and in the learning outcomes of study programmes came up as another striking difference. In Asia these seem to have a very straightforward and undisputed place in higher education, whereas these seem to be lacking almost completely in Europe.

Other "cultural" differences that came up during the discussions are more top-down (e.g. change ignited by a new legal framework), versus bottom-up approaches (e.g. the emergence of competence-based education as the result of a grass-root movement); the fact that in Asia reference is also made to the (more American) term "OBE" (outcomes based education) rather than merely to "LO"-approach and the importance of what one could refer to as a "professional culture" (e.g. a university teacher who is an engineer by training but eventually starts to identify him/herself as an educationalist).

In sum, these differences were perceived as richness but these stressed as well that we need to be aware of these, just like of the importance of languages (to describe different concepts, specific terminology/jargon,...) as well in such intercontinental intercultural encounters.

## Conclusions

As an overall conclusion to the meeting, some general recommendations were formulated and some arrangements were made on the concrete follow-up of the meeting.

Participants of the joined Peer Learning Activity on Qualifications Frameworks in relation to Quality Assurance and Recognition & the Expert Group Meeting on Credit Transfer Mechanism and Learning Outcomes of 26th-28th April 2017 in Ghent (Belgium), as some general recommendations, agreed to:

- Keep learning from each other and from existing projects and agreements (SHARE, Tuning education structures in Europe, Lisbon Recognition Convention,...)
- Keep looking for “intercontinental” synergies, cooperation opportunities,...
- Keep supporting institutions in using credits and learning outcomes for recognition and mobility purposes
- Use the cultural differences as a strong approach towards system enhancement

In order to assure follow-up and facilitate the achievement of the proposed actions agreed a call to participate in an online evaluation was sent to all participants together with all presentations. Also this full report is distributed to the participants and will be made widely available. The experts involved welcome all comments very well.

*The organizers explicitly wish to thank all presenters and participants for their active contribution to a successful meeting.*

## Expert Group Meeting on Credit Transfer Mechanism and Learning Outcomes

### State of affairs

In March 2016 a first ASEM Expert Group Meeting on Credit Transfer Mechanism and Learning Outcomes was held in Beijing (PRC). The meeting had representatives from *Brunei Darussalam, China, Estonia, Indonesia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Malaysia, Thailand, United Kingdom (& ASEAN University Network)*. Also these countries agreed to contribute as a member but were not able to be present during the first meeting: *Australia, Belgium (Flemish & French Community), Portugal, Romania (& ASEM Education Secretariat)*.

During the joined Peer Learning Activity on Qualifications Frameworks in relation to Quality Assurance and Recognition & the Expert Group Meeting on Credit Transfer Mechanism and Learning Outcomes of 26th-28th April 2017 in Ghent (Belgium), the members of the Expert Group present determined that:

- No other communication besides the 2 documents that were the result of the first meeting (Consensus document & Terms of Reference) were distributed after the meeting;
- No concrete actions were taken regarding the points noted down in the Consensus document;
- No clear overview of the 'members' of the Expert Group is available;
- No news came on the update of the "Compendium on Credits and Learning Outcomes among ASEM Countries", although an partly updated version is now published on the website of the ASEM-education secretariat.

### TO DO's

Because of the above, the members of the Expert Group present agreed to:

- Prepare a list of contact persons for the working group;
- Prepare a report of this meeting (= the current document);
- Revisit the original assignment of the ASEM-secretariat for the working group;
- Organize a follow-up meeting to prepare proposals for the next ministerial meeting in South-Korea in November (proposal: back-to-back with a following Share-meeting in Bangkok 30-31 August 2017)

### Proposed concrete actions / focal points

Based on their specific discussions and the overall meeting during the joined meeting, the members of the Expert Group present agreed that the main focus of the Expert Group should be on interregional mobility and to look into possibilities to lower the threshold for interregional mobility.

The experts revisited the conclusions of the first meeting and interpreted these as follows:

- Organize a follow-up meeting: in Ghent (April 2017) – possibly also in Thailand (August 2017)
- Invite China to start the proposed research and issue a call for action on the topic of the working group
- The proposed “ASEM Study/Courses Portal” on Credit Transfer and Learning Outcomes to promote student mobility should not be a kind of “supermarket” with the best courses but rather a useful tool with information on the use of credit transfer and learning outcomes i.e. something very concrete, based on the results of this meeting. The experts propose following way of working:
  - Identify the use (best practices) of learning outcomes in study/course catalogues (as the result of course design)
  - Describe the use of credits/grades within a country/institutional context (starting from the existing compendium):
    - Start with one or two countries → look for examples ourselves (within our universities?);
    - Work on the basis of an agreed template;
    - Explore a system of credit transfer and grade conversion between these countries.

It was concluded that all countries/representatives present at the meeting will be invited to participate/contribute to future actions (just like the members of the Expert Group not present).

## ANNEX 1: Programme



**Flanders**  
is education & training



**FÉDÉRATION**  
WALLONIE-BRUXELLES  
ENSEIGNEMENT  
ET RECHERCHE  
SCIENTIFIQUE



# ASEM Programme

Peer Learning Activity on Qualification Frameworks in relation to Quality  
Assurance and Recognition

&

Expert Group Meeting on Credit Transfer Mechanism and Learning Outcomes

26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> April 2017, Ghent

Venue: Ghent University, 'Het Pand', Onderbergen 1, 9000 Gent

Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2017: state of play

13.00h Registration and lunch @Novicengang (between 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor)

14.00h Welcome – Magalie Soenen (Belgium/Flemish Community) Dormitorium (2<sup>nd</sup> floor)

& Frederik De Decker (Ghent University)

14.15h SHARE project - Michael Hörig (DAAD)

15.00h Revised ECTS-users guide – Klara Engels-Perenyi (EC)

15.30h Coffee break

16.00h Credit transfer and Quality assurance – Chantavit Sujatanond (SEAMEO)

16.30h Feedback Bologna Follow Up Group Peer review QF – Magalie Soenen (Belgium/Flemish Community)

17.00h Free time

19.00h Dinner@BelgaQueen (Graslei 10, 9000 Gent)

Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017: use of credits and LO in day to day academic practice

Use of credit transfer within an institution **Oude Infirmerie (2nd floor)**

9.30h Mapping credit transfer systems in Asia – Frederik De Decker (Ghent University)

10.00h Grade conversion in Europe/Asia/EGRACONS – Paul Leys tbc (Ghent University)

11.00h Coffee break

11.30h Interactive session:

- What are obstacles/facilitators for credit transfer?
- Credit transfer: automatic or not?
- Input from all countries/institutions. Look into examples of LA, TOR to investigate problems and way of handling things

12.30h Lunch **Uttenhove (2nd floor)**

Qualification Frameworks & Learning Outcomes **Oude Infirmerie (2nd floor)**

14.00h Assessment and demonstration of achieved learning outcomes: recommendations and good practices – Dagmar Provijn (NVAO)

14.30h LO, QF and external QA, based on the concept underlying the European Standards and Guidelines 2015 – Colin Tück (EQAR)

15.00h How to go from NQF to programme level/Learning outcomes: linked to level, orientation/How to formulate learning outcomes

15.30h Coffee break

16.00h Interactive session with input from all countries/institutions

17.30h Guided boat tour through historic center of Ghent

19.00h Dinner @KorenleiTwee (Korenlei 2, 9000 Gent)

Friday 28<sup>th</sup> April: PLA QF in relation to QA and recognition

9.00h 3 European and 3 Asian countries present their approach from governmental and institutional level. (Belgium/French Community, Thailand, Belgium/Flemish Community) **Oude Infirmerie (2nd floor)**

12.00h Lunch **Uttenhove (2nd floor)**

13.00h 3 European and 3 Asian countries present their approach from governmental and institutional level. (Romania, Germany, France, Brunei) **Oude Infirmerie (2nd floor)**

15.00h Conclusions and way forward

15.30h Goodbye

## ANNEX 2: List of participants

<b>Country</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>E-mail</b>
Lithuania	Nora Skaburskiene	<a href="mailto:nora.skaburskiene@skvc.lt">nora.skaburskiene@skvc.lt</a>
Romania	Marian Tiplic	<a href="mailto:ioan-marian.tiplic@ulbsibiu.ro">ioan-marian.tiplic@ulbsibiu.ro</a>
Germany	Alexandra Angress	<a href="mailto:Alexandra.Angress@h-ab.de">Alexandra.Angress@h-ab.de</a>
Germany	Frank Niedermeier	<a href="mailto:frank.niedermeier@uni-potsdam.de">frank.niedermeier@uni-potsdam.de</a>
France	Elizabeth Zamorano	<a href="mailto:zamorano@ciep.fr">zamorano@ciep.fr</a>
France	Hélène Lagier	<a href="mailto:helene.lagier@recherche.gouv.fr">helene.lagier@recherche.gouv.fr</a>
Norway	Mari Elken	<a href="mailto:mari.elken@nifu.no">mari.elken@nifu.no</a>
Brunei Darussalam	Masairol Masri Nongnuch	<a href="mailto:masairol.masri@ubd.edu.bn">masairol.masri@ubd.edu.bn</a>
Thailand	Chunbandhit	<a href="mailto:nongnuch.ohec@gmail.com">nongnuch.ohec@gmail.com</a>
Thailand	Bundit Rhipakorn	<a href="mailto:bundit@cpe.kmutt.ac.th">bundit@cpe.kmutt.ac.th</a>
Belgium/Flemish Community	Magalie Soenen	<a href="mailto:magalie.soenen@ond.vlaanderen.be">magalie.soenen@ond.vlaanderen.be</a>
Belgium/Flemish Community	Frederik De Decker	<a href="mailto:Frederik.DeDecker@ugent.be">Frederik.DeDecker@ugent.be</a>
Belgium/Flemish Community	Nadia Reynders	<a href="mailto:Nadia.Reynders@ond.vlaanderen.be">Nadia.Reynders@ond.vlaanderen.be</a>
Belgium/Flemish Community	Mark Verbeke	<a href="mailto:Mark.Verbeke@arteveldehs.be">Mark.Verbeke@arteveldehs.be</a>
Belgium/Flemish Community	Lore Demedts	<a href="mailto:Lore.Demedts@arteveldehs.be">Lore.Demedts@arteveldehs.be</a>
Belgium/French Community	Benjamin Monnoye	<a href="mailto:Benjamin.MONNOYE@cfwb.be">Benjamin.MONNOYE@cfwb.be</a>
Belgium/French Community	Kevin Guillaume	<a href="mailto:kevin.guillaume@ares-ac.be">kevin.guillaume@ares-ac.be</a>
SEAMEO RIHED	Chantavit Sujatanond	<a href="mailto:chantavit@rihed.seameo.org">chantavit@rihed.seameo.org</a>
DAAD	Michael Hörig	<a href="mailto:hoerig@daad.de">hoerig@daad.de</a>
EQAR	Colin Tuck	<a href="mailto:colin.tueck@eqar.eu">colin.tueck@eqar.eu</a>
NVAO	Dagmar Provijn	<a href="mailto:d.provijn@nvaio.net">d.provijn@nvaio.net</a>
European Commission	Klara Engels-Perenyi	<a href="mailto:Klara.ENGELS-PERENYI@ec.europa.eu">Klara.ENGELS-PERENYI@ec.europa.eu</a>